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ABSTRACT

This study reports on the impact of inquiry on the social studies curriculum in 40 New Jersey public senior high schools as of 1974. The research is a followup study to one conducted in 1964. Responses to a questionnaire, related to curriculum revision, were received from principals, department heads, and teachers of the same schools surveyed a decade earlier. Changes during the 10-year interval, as shown by the study, include (1) an increase in the number of social studies courses, (2) a trend toward elective, micro-courses (rather than full-year courses), (3) a shift toward student involvement on conceptual issues, (4) an increase in the numbers of courses in behavioral sciences and area studies, and (5) a slight increase in the use of inquiry techniques with an accompanying plea for materials and facilities to enrich and further increase these student-centered techniques. In regard to valuable influences on curriculum revision, a strong preference is indicated for educational books by Bruner, Penton, Glasser, Silverman, and Postman and Weingartner. In addition, the National Association for Secondary School Principals Bulletin, National Council for the Social Studies materials, and social studies texts also rated high. Despite these encouraging trends, need is suggested for increased teacher training in the use of inquiry techniques. (JH)

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A Case Study:

Curriculum Reform in New Jersey, A Decade Later

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What impact has Inquiry had on the secondary social studies curriculum? This question was the central focus of a follow-up study conducted ten years after research resulted in a status study for Rutgers, The State University.¹ Because that doctoral dissertation reflects curriculum revision barely beginning in the light of "The New Social Studies" taking shape in the Sixties, research a decade later with the same schools has produced interesting, if not dramatic contrasts.

In 1964, a random selection of 50 schools was made from the 253 New Jersey public senior high schools listed in the New Jersey Department of Education Directory. From a review of the pertinent literature concerning variables related to curriculum revision, questionnaires were devised for principals, social studies teachers and department heads. Responses were received from 41 staffs, or 82 per cent of the surveyed schools.

In 1974, questionnaires were mailed to the 41 schools whose staffs participated in the earlier study. Only one school had closed within that period, leaving 40 schools to be surveyed. Of that number, 90 per cent of the staffs responded.

Nature of Curriculum Revision

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Table 1 shows percentages of responses of principals, social studies teachers and department heads relating to the nature of curriculum revision in their schools. All three groups of respondents stated that the number of social studies courses added has increased, and write-ins indicated a shift

TABLE 1

Percentages of Responses of Principals, Department Heads
and Teachers Relating to the Nature of Curriculum Revision

	Principals		Department Heads		Teachers	
	1965 N=37	1975 N=30	1965 N=34	1975 N=29	1965 N=196	1975 N=94
To what degree has the social studies curriculum in your system, kindergarten through grade 12, been revised? ^a						
(a) Two or more new courses have been added	24	89	32	89	27	88
(b) One new course has been added	--	--	9	--	8	--
(c) At least one new course has been added and some existing courses have been modified	58	13	50	27	47	13
(d) At least one existing course has been modified	21	13	29	10	14	7
(e) Complete revision has taken place ^b	3	--	3	--	4	--
(f) No revision has taken place	3	--	--	--	5	--

^aParticipants could indicate more than one response for each item.

^bWritten in by participants.

to micro- (rather than full-year) courses.

Table 2 indicates that the responses of principals and teachers regarding the addition of social studies courses reflect a definite change. The curriculum has expanded to include behavioral studies (sociology, psychology, and/or anthropology), area studies, and world cultures. Less emphasis seems to have been made on revising courses on the basis of the type of student: slow learner or advanced placement. In 1965, more attention was expressed for advanced placement or honors courses as supplements to the curriculum. Increased attention, particularly in urban schools, is currently being given to minority groups, as reflected by special courses in minority and/or ethnic studies. The preoccupation with the West has broadened to include a focus on non-Western cultures, as well, specifically Asia. Less emphasis is afforded to Latin America and/or Africa, but certainly more attention is reported in these areas than was a decade ago.

Open-ended Responses

In addition to the 1965 questionnaire, a supplement was included to elicit open-ended responses from the participants. Table 3 reveals interesting answers. While most social studies teachers and department heads stated that students are more demanding about teaching techniques, not so striking a number of responses indicates students are generally more able to do problem solving. Furthermore, while respondents indicate greater emphasis on increasing student involvement and on conceptual study (rather than mere retention of facts), students are reported to be more easily bored than ever before.

TABLE 2

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Percentages of Responses of
Principals and Teachers
Regarding the Addition of Social Studies Courses

	Principals		Teachers	
	1965	1975	1965	1975
	N=37	N=30	N=196	N=94
From the following list, which courses have been added in your school? ^a				
(a) courses in the behavioral sciences (sociology, psychology, anthropology)	24	62	27	79
(b) courses in world cultures or area studies	29	55	36	70
(c) courses for advanced placement	24	13	29	29
(d) courses for slow learners	58	20	41	38
(e) courses for increasing levels of difficulty	32	--	17	21
(f) courses in increased numbers at the same level of difficulty	16	--	4	36
(g) other ^b				
-humanities course added	--	13	--	--
-minorities course added	--	34	--	--
-careers course added	--	3	--	--

^aParticipants could indicate more than one response for each item.

^bWritten in by participants.

Perhaps this apparent dilemma can be clarified by the responses to the last question in Table 3, "What specific areas of curriculum reform do you believe are most vital today?" Respondents said that a flexible curriculum emphasizing (1) problem solving, (2) individualized instruction, and (3) independent study is necessary. Write-ins emphasized the need for materials and facilities to accomplish these goals. Also, released time and summer workshops to update and upgrade the curriculum were frequently requested.²

Students' attitudes were described in responses to several open-ended questions. Concerning issues related to Watergate (asked before President Nixon resigned), most students were reported to have expressed distrust, disrespect, and disenchantment with government. Many respondents said that students "expect" corruption in government, at all levels. Teachers and department heads reported a greater ability, generally, for students in problem solving and a greater awareness of non-Western cultures, particularly Asia. Most striking, however, was the assessment that students are more demanding and more easily bored than ever before.

Impact of literature

Most participants stated that Social Education was, in general, worthwhile, workable, and/or realistic for their needs. Table 4 shows that the most frequently mentioned readings principals considered as influencing curriculum revision were education texts. Scholars most often cited were Bruner, Fenton, Glasser, Silberman, and Postman and Weingartner. Also listed as influential readings were the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Bulletin (N.A.S.S.P.), National Council for the Social

TABLE 3

Percentages of Responses of Department Heads and Teachers,^a
Concerning the Status of Curriculum and Student Attitudes

	Department Heads 1975 N=29	Teachers 1975 N=93
1. In general, do you find that your students are more capable of problem solving?		
(a) yes	45	34
(b) no	31	42
(c) somewhat more capable	17	4
(d) bright students, yes; slow students, no	3	2
2. In general, do you find that your students are more critical, demanding, easily bored, or particular about teaching techniques?		
(a) yes	66	73
(b) no	14	10
(c) somewhat	7	6
(d) slower students are apathetic	10	10
3. What changes have you made in your own teaching?		
(a) emphasize concepts more than retention of facts, alone	20	33
(b) increased attention to affective domain	14	4
(c) emphasize increased student involvement	52	33
(d) increased use of inquiry techniques	7	24
(e) focus on non-West and ethnic studies	7	--
(f) updated and upgraded content & process	--	3
(g) return to traditional approaches	--	2
4. Do you find the ideas in <u>Social Education</u> , in general, worthwhile, workable, and/or realistic for your needs?		
(a) yes	52	24
(b) no	10	13
(c) to some degree	21	24
(d) should be more practical	17	6
5. In general, what impact has the Watergate situation had on your students?*		
(a) increased student awareness & interest in the workings of government; students question more	21	10
(b) students reflect distrust, cynicism, disrespect, and/or lack of confidence in government	79	69
(c) little impact, if any	--	9
(d) no answer	--	12

TABLE 3
Continued

6. Do you think students today know more about Asia, Africa, and Latin America than ; students did ten years ago?		
(a) yes	49	53
(b) no	32	34
(c) attitudes seem the same	8	10
(d) no answer	11	10
7. What specific areas of curriculum reform do you believe are most vital today?		
(a) need to emphasize concepts (both cognitive and affective) in a flexible curriculum (options, micro-courses)	34	14
(b) emphasize problem solving, individualized instruction, and independent study (make materials and facilities available)	34	35
(c) add courses	24	32
(d) reading	7	3
(e) more community involvement: "Open Walls" concept	--	4
(f) return to traditional courses	--	7
(g) more attention to non-college bound students	--	3

^aParticipants wrote in responses.

*Asked before President Nixon resigned.

TABLE 4

Percentages of Responses of Principals
Regarding Reading Materials
Which Have Influenced Curriculum Revision

What reading materials (periodicals, books, monographs) have been the most valuable influences on curriculum revision on your school? ^a	1965 N=38	1975 N=30
1. <u>National Association for Secondary School Principals Bulletin</u>	32	16
2. Education texts ^b	42	45
3. National Council for the Social Studies Materials	24	10
4. <u>Social Education</u>	8	16
5. <u>National Education Association Journal</u>	5	--
6. <u>New Jersey Education Association Journal</u>	3	--
7. New Jersey State Department Bulletins	13	3
8. Social science journals	3	3
9. <u>Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Yearbooks</u>	13	3
10. Social studies texts	21	13
11. <u>The Nation's Schools</u>	5	3
12. <u>Phi Delta Kappan</u>	--	3
13. <u>New York Times</u>	--	3

^aParticipants wrote in responses, and could indicate more than one response.

^bCited were Bruner, Fenton, Glasser, Silberman, and Postman and Weingartner.

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Studies materials and Social Education.

Summary and Conclusion

Responses indicate a very different social studies curriculum in 1975 in (1) increased numbers of courses; (2) a trend towards elective, micro-courses (rather than full-year courses; (3) a shift to student involvement on conceptual issues rather than passive students retaining only facts; (4) increased courses in behavioral sciences and area studies; (5) a slight increase in the use of inquiry techniques with an accompanying plea for materials and facilities to enrich and further increase these student-centered techniques.

Further study is needed concerning teacher education programs for both prospective and experienced teachers. At the University of Iowa and the State University of New York at New Paltz, I have noted little increase in the past seven years in the awareness and/or ability of teachers in using inquiry techniques. Where intensive workshops have been conducted for experienced teachers, for example, at the University of Hawaii, where I taught four workshops in two summers, the results have been more satisfactory. Also, in cases in which new materials, such as Man, A Course of Study, have accompanying workshops to familiarize teachers with new techniques, teachers are more able and confident.²

This summer, 80 per cent of one of my classes of experienced teachers said they had not had any prior experience or instruction in more contemporary techniques including simulation, role play, case study, and laboratory lessons.

The 1975 curriculum in New Jersey may look better on paper. Indications that students are more involved, more capable of problem solving, and more aware

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of behavioral sciences and world cultures are reassuring. We need a closer look at what is actually happening in the classroom to know just how dramatic the change is, and to what degree.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Barbara Olmo, A Study to Determine the Status of the Social Studies Curriculum Development in Selected New Jersey Public Secondary School, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Rutgers, The State University, 1965.

² See "Implications of the Social Studies Projects for Curriculum Building in Local Districts," by Norris M. Sanders and Marlin L. Tanck in Social Education (April, 1970), pp. 447-449. The issue features an appraisal of the twenty-six national social studies projects and some valuable observations and advice to educators in local districts.

³ See the section, "Can We Change the Teaching of Social Studies in the Schools?" (six articles), in Social Education (March, 1973), pp. 190-216.